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Though the reading instruction programs for disadvantaged children are making progress, they are not accomplishing their goal to eliminate the progressively wider gap in reading achievement between socially and economically deprived youngsters and those belonging to the average middle-class group. The following are reasons for this failure to teach reading effectively to the disadvantaged: (1) stimulus deprivation and environmental disadvantage, (2) inadequate preparation of teachers and supervisors, (3) large classes organized in a tight structure, (4) lack of clinical diagnosis and corrective treatment of reading disabilities, (5) lack of adequate parent-community involvement in the reading program, and (6) lack of new tools for the evaluation of reading progress. There is no one solution to the problem, but among possible remedies are the expansion of the prekindergarten program with adequate followthrough, the planning of a sequential developmental reading program with staff involvement, the reduction of class size and teaching range, the organization of preservice and inservice training courses for teachers and supervisors, and greater parent-community involvement. References are included (WL)

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IS THE READING INSTRUCTION THAT WE ARE PROVIDING THE DISADVANTAGED ADEQUATE?

Comments by

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Board of Education of the City of New York

at the

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I am glad that the topic given to me as the subject for my presentation is in the form of a question: "Is the reading instruction that we are providing the disadvantaged adequate?" for I can answer this question with an emphatic, no!

Are we making any progress in our drive to have the disadvantaged learn to read? The answer here is, yes; there are definite benchmarks that indicate areas in which progress is being made. However, at the present time, we are not providing the socially-economically disadvantaged of the nation with the reading ability needed to enable them to become self-supporting adults. Robert J. Havighurst[1] identifies the socially disadvantaged as follows:

1. They are at the bottom of American society in terms of income.
2. Many have a rural background.
3. They suffer from social and economic discrimination.
4. Although they are widely distributed in the United States, they cluster in the big cities.

In racial and ethnic terms, the children of the disadvantaged make up 20 per cent of the child population of the nation and 40 to 70 per cent of the children in our 20 largest cities. They consist mainly of whites and Negroes from the rural south, Puerto Ricans who have migrated to a few great cities, Mexicans and Spanish Americans who have migrated into the southwest and the middle west.

These are the children who have been denied the social experience that other middle-class children have, as:

1. A family environment in which people read, in which there are a variety of toys, play materials of different colors and sizes, objects that challenge the creativity of the child's hands and mind.

2. A family who talks together, answering the child's questions, encouraging him to ask questions, extending his vocabulary with new words, giving him the opportunity to express an opinion.

THE SOCIALLY DEPRIVED AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

What impact has deprivation had on the progress of the disadvantaged in reading? Martin Deutsch(2) states that by the time disadvantaged children reach junior high school, sixty per cent are retarded one to four years in reading. He states that lack of appropriate language stimulation early in life, both at school and at home, may make success in reading, as well as in other school activities, progressively more difficult since the child becomes less and less responsive to remediation as he grows older.

A study by Allen H. Barton(3) showed that in classes where children came from lower-skilled, lower-paid families, mean percentages of classes reading one or more years below actual grade level was 33 per cent as contrasted with 6 per cent among middle-class families.

The study reported on in 1963 by Walter Loban(4) showed that children who were low in general language ability were also low in reading ability. The gap between the high and low groups seemed to widen each year. His study found that writing and reading ability were related to socioeconomic position; those in the lowest socioeconomic groups were below average in writing and in reading achievement.

Superintendent of New York City schools, Dr. Bernard E. Donovan,(5) stated at a news conference on November 1, 1967, at which he made public the city-wide reading test results for 1966-67:

"Despite evidence that pupils showed growth in reading during the last school year, the Board of Education, the professional staff, and I have serious concern that so many of our pupils who live in poverty still read below grade level."

Repeating his concern about continued reading retardation in areas of poverty, the Superintendent said:

"The large-city school districts throughout the nation have not been able to teach reading effectively to disadvantaged children. Nevertheless, I pledge continued and intensified efforts of our teachers and our supervisors to bring all pupils up to the maximum of their potential."

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Why haven't the great cities throughout the nation been able to teach reading effectively to disadvantaged children? The Superintendent of Schools in our city has had reading improvement as his major objective for the past five years. Budget requests have been channeled to achieve this goal. There is no <u>one</u> reason but <u>many</u> reasons to be found in all big cities. Let's consider a few:

<u>Reason One</u>: <u>The effect of inner-city life itself on the child</u>.

A child of the slums is not part of the mainstream of American life. Someone has said, he does not even bathe in its tributaries! He suffers from stimulus deprivation and environmental disadvantage. These are the negative factors that can destroy a child's motivation to achieve, especially in the area of concern to us today — reading.

Reason Two: The impact of inadequate preparation of teachers and supervisors; preservice and in-service

In most cases, our colleges and universities are not preparing teachers and supervisors adequately to work with the "new immigrants," as Harry Rivlin, Dean of Teacher Education at Fordham University, calls the children who make up the bulk of the population in our great cities.(6) In addition, school systems have not had the intensive, all-out drive on teacher-supervisor improvement in the area of reading needed to effect change.

Reason Three: The difficulties of teaching large-size classes in a tight form of organization

Studies by Deutsch show that some teachers in inner-city schools are spending as much as 80 per cent of the school day on disciplining and routine details, as cookie funds, reports, and the like. When, I ask you, are the children being taught to read?

Reason Four: Lack of an extended developmental program in which corrective and clinical diagnosis and treatment of reading disability are an integer.

Why have we not provided a carefully-planned sequential reading program, prekindergarten through adulthood, with corrective-clinical services as needed? Is it because we fear that planning, structure, sequence are characteristics that imply we are not innovative and not using materials and approaches to meet children's needs?

Reason Five: Lack of adequate parent-community involvement in the reading program

We talk glibely of involvement, but our plans have not borne fruit. Parents, school volunteers, school aides, members of the community have to date not played their full role in the reading-improvement program in our schools.

Reason Six: Lack of new tools for evaluation and lack of accountability for reading progress

In how many of our schools servicing the disadvantaged, and especially those schools at the elementary level, is there an evaluation program that can withstand scrutiny? In how many of these schools do the principal and teachers know the reading progress of each child and, if that child is not making adequate progress, see that immediate action is taken?

WHAT ARE THE REMEDIES?

Remedies to the ills I have just cited don't come in small-or large-size bottles, or in quick, easy doses. These ills are complex and deep-seated; they have already been with us too long for the sake of the disadvantaged children who are afflicted and for the welfare of society that bears the brunt of the non-reader in the shape of the school dropout and the illiterate adult, both of whom represent waste of human potential and end as drags on the nation's economy.

Let's consider together what is being done in some big cities and what can be done to effect improvement.

Action One: Expand greatly the prekindergarten program with an adequate follow-through.

At the present time, in New York City, 9,150 children are enrolled in prekindergarten this 1967-68 school year. Last summer 24,000 were enrolled in the Headstart Program. These numbers are completely inadequate in light of the pressing needs of this great city enrolling 1,100,000 children. Lack of space is given as the answer. This is an answer we cannot and must not buy! Space must be found, just as space and money were found to build a World's Fair, a new Madison Square sports arena, and other projects.

A prekindergarten program, with an adequate follow-through program in the kindergarten and first grade, is needed to take advantage of the gains that come from early training at a time of maximum plasticity. It is needed also to serve as a bridge between the culture of the home in the inner city and the culture of the middle-class school.

What program content will be most effective in helping the disadvantaged prekindergartener move ahead? The staff of our Bureau of Early Childhood Education and Dr. Martin Deutsch,(7) who has headed a research study on the prekindergarten child over the past 6 years in New York City, believe that an effective program for the disadvantaged must highlight motivation, experiential background, mastery of language, and auditory and visual perception.

Let's consider the first, motivation. It is necessary that the young child have confidence in his ability to learn and, later, to learn to read. It is clear that teachers, parents, and the disadvantaged child himself must recognize that the child can learn and—given instruction suitable to his needs—will learn to read as well as his more advantaged classmates. We have to cast aside the false concept that disadvantaged children have a low ceiling of expectancy and replace it with a determination that the disadvantaged child can and will learn to read.

And now the second essential, experiential background. The disadvantaged child lacks ability to recognize English words and language patterns as symbols or sound-pictures of things and ideas. Because of his weakness in experiential background, we now know that he has difficulty in understanding the language of textbooks and of his teacher. It is in the prekindergarten that we work hard to build this experiential background and continue the planned, sequential building program in kindergarten, grade 1, 2, and so on.

The third essential, mastery of language, is one of the keys needed to unlock the world of reading for the child. Children should be exposed to the alphabet in the prekindergarten and work with letters in different forms. They should have planned opportunities to talk, talk, talk; to use a pair of working telephones, play telephones, and a Listening Center.

The fourth essential is auditory and visual perception. Most times the disadvantaged child is likely to engage in marginal listening; that is, he may listen part of the time, then let his thoughts wander beyond the classroom. Research shows that elementary-level pupils spend more than 50 per cent of the school day listening to someone. The child from the inner city who lives in one or two crowded rooms has learned before he came to school to "tune out" his teacher.

How a child pronounces words reveals how he hears them and how he hears them will later often determine how he will spell them and pronounce them in oral reading. It is important for the teacher, therefore, to have acute auditory discrimination in order to detect pupils' initial errors so that mistakes are not reinforced through repeated incorrect usage.

From the viewpoint of visual perception, the urban slum offers the child a minimal range of stimuli. We know that among the skills necessary for reading are form discrimination and visual spatial organization. Children from depressed areas have not developed these requisite skills by the time they enter first grade and, consequently, are not ready for reading.

Thus, we need to take a hard look at what is being done in relation to disadvantaged children of prekindergarten age in order to move them into organized programs and, once so enrolled, to make certain that the programs are structured to insure maximum development in the skills basic to reading.

Action Two: Plan with the staff a sequential developmental reading program for the school in which corrective — clinical services are an integer.

This action underscores that reading must, for most of our inner-city children, be taught throughout the child's entire school life, prekindergarten through grade 12, with a carefully-planned network of services to meet the needs not only of the in-school child but also of out-of-school poor readers and non-readers. The needs of this latter group should and can be met through the establishment of a network of reading centers under the supervision of expert teachers of reading in schools, in libraries, in vacant stores, or in the community education centers just proposed in the latest "Statement of Policy and Proposed Action by the Regents of the University of the State of New York."(8)

This need for comprehensiveness implies also that all special reading services, whether for the advanced or retarded reader, must be regarded as a basic part of the school's developmental reading program. Corrective reading and clinical reading services must be made available to children in grade 1 and 2 in order that reasons for lack of advancement in reading readiness or reading can be diagnosed as early as possible and corrective teaching or other assistance provided. This year in New York City we are using Title I funds to work with private reading clinics in colleges, in hospitals, and in other private agencies in order to combine all the resources available in clinically diagnosing problems and teaching teachers to deal with those problems within their scope.

This need for a long-span system implies, in addition, that a sequential skill program for the full gambit from prekindergarten to grade 12 must be carefully developed. In New York City, we have recognized this aspect and have issued a new brochure entitled, "Sequential Levels of Reading Skills," Prek.-12.

The need for a comprehensive reading program underscores that we must examine critically our programs in beginning reading. In so doing, we need to examine the findings of the twenty-seven first-grade reading studies sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education during 1964-65 and the results of replication studies.(9) For example, the CRAFT Study(10) conducted over the past few years in schools in poverty areas of New York City under the direction of Dr. Albert J. Harris, includes nine major recommendations that merit attention in designing a beginning reading program of value to the disadvantaged. Let me comment on a few of the recommendations; the entire report merits your attention.

1. The major conclusion is that the teacher is far more important than the method.

2. The results of the study suggest the desirability of modifying the kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children in the direction of including sequentially-planned activities for the development of specific aspects of reading readiness. Results suggest that children who show accelerated readiness may benefit from an earlier start in reading. The title of a recent article, "Kindergarteners are Ready. Are We?" (11) merits reading.

3. The results have not shown a decisive advantage for any of the methods used in the study; i.e., Basal Reader; Phonovisual; Language - Experience; Language Experience; Audio-Visual.
Time and effort must be used to develop an effective school reading program.

Action Three: Reduce class size and teaching range in order that each teacher has a teachable group. Set up new forms of organization for meeting the children's needs most effectively, as by grouping, team teaching, departmentalization, nongradedness, other. In the inner-city schools, teachers need the support that comes from working with their colleagues in order to meet children's reading needs.

Smaller class size increases the amount of time a teacher has to devote to each child. In New York City every ~~kindergarten and~~ first grade in all of the schools serving the disadvantaged now has a register of 15. Every second grade of a special service school, as we term them, a register of 20. Can this practice of low registers be retained and extended to grade 3? In light of budget cuts for next year, we don't know. However, we believe that, if the teachers receive training and if they are properly supervised, reduced registers over an extended period of time should yield results.

Action Four: Design and implement new, imaginative, extensive programs of preservice and in-service training for both teachers and supervisors. With this in mind, what is the job for our colleges, our Board of Education, our supervisors?

Let's start with the college first. Let me share with you a few suggestions of my own or from Dr. Margaret Parke, professor, Brooklyn College. Our colleges need to —

1. Evaluate more carefully what is happening in the teaching of reading in integrated methods courses and move toward meeting the demands for separate reading and language courses at the undergraduate level, if necessary.

2. Develop training courses that focus on having graduate or undergraduate students work with children, as travelling as a class by bus to a school as Dr. Donald Durrell does in Boston.

3. Place student teachers as a team in a school in the inner city where the reading program is judged to be good.

4. Set up institutes or in-service courses for present principals and supervisors on the Organization and Supervision of Reading and Language Programs for the Disadvantaged.

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4. Establish a system for evaluating each child's needs and progress in reading. (This involves informal and formal testing, analysis of results, and teaching to meet needs.)

5. Set up an in-service program in reading and in handling those routines that interfere with reading instruction. Help the new teacher to develop a wide range of teaching skills and styles.

6. Place responsibility for achieving results with the class teacher, but give her the support necessary to do an adequate job. (For example, Deutsch found in a study involving disadvantaged children that the teacher was devoting as much as 80 per cent of the school day to disciplining and routines, such as collecting milk money, and handling reports. Even with the best teachers, this never fell below 50 per cent. The implications are extremely important and suggest that the disadvantaged child receives only one-half to one-third the exposure to learning that he should receive — and reading is an important part of that learning.)

7. Distribute pupils so that teachers have teachable classes. (Some teachers can work with a wide range of abilities; others cannot.)

8. Inventory a newcomer's reading needs before assigning him permanently to a class.

9. Place your strong teachers in the first, second, and third grades.

10. Coordinate the efforts of guidance personnel, corrective reading teachers, librarian, speech teacher, teacher aides, reading clinicians, psychologist, and other staff and agencies so that you have a team, not independent generals.

11. Plan with college personnel for the involvement in the school's reading program of teachers-in-training, including student teachers and graduate students.

12. Obtain special help for pupils in grades 1 and 2 not making progress, as from the corrective reading teacher or from the Board of Education's reading clinic or an outside clinical agency.

13. Develop a school volunteer reading program and, if necessary, a school volunteer conversational English program, in order to provide that one-to-one relationship so important to the disadvantaged child.

14. Involve parents in the reading program.

15. Set up a plan for the supervision of the reading program.

16. See that the teacher has books to use with children on the first day of school; arrange for the child to take home the reader or materials from which he is receiving instruction at intervals in order that parents can observe progress.

17. Keep the parents and the community informed as to the children's progress in reading. (Use innovative ways to do this, as 8 mm. films showing the school's reading program. These films can be shown in the local supermarket, in a store-front classroom, or in an out-of-doors read-a-thon.)

Action Five: Involve parents and community people in helping the disadvantaged to read better.

One of the exciting advances that we may attribute to Project Head Start is how much we have learned about the effectiveness of including parents, and, indeed, the whole community, in the children's "head start." Recently reported research indicates that just having the parent read to a child for twenty minutes an evening when the child is two or three years old results in significant changes in the child's language abilities.(12) Research on the prekindergarten project in New York City schools showed that the effectiveness of the work with children was directly related to the extent of parent involvement.

As we look at what has been done throughout the country to involve parents of disadvantaged children and members of the inner-city community in our reading-improvement programs, we have to admit that we have merely scratched the surface. In our city, some parents from disadvantaged areas are working as volunteers in the School Volunteer Reading Help Program of the Board of Education; some are serving as paid school aides and assisting by duplicating materials, distributing books, checking answers in workbooks, filling book orders, and other duties. We have not, however, involved parents of our disadvantaged to our satisfaction or to theirs.

This year, Title I money was earmarked by our city schools for use in developing innovative projects for getting parents involved in the reading program. Some projects suggested were workshops for parents in the home of one mother (Mrs. Rivera's Living Room School); or a reading club for mothers in a storefront, in a community center, in a room in a housing project; or exhibits with demonstrators involving "talking books," reading machines, tapes, and films of children at work for use in local restaurants, community houses, and other locations where parents do come, stop, see, and, therefore, learn about a school's program of reading; or parent-developed booklets in both Spanish and English that explain the reading program.

Have these new ideas been of value? We don't know as yet. There is one thing we do know, however. If they are not successful, we must continue to seek better ways for involving parents and the community in the school's reading program. No school can make progress alone!

The Open Sesame?

You and I know there are other actions to effect improvement in reading that can be taken in any city. For example, I have not touched on the

whole area of materials for use with all disadvantaged children and the special approaches needed in working with non-English speaking disadvantaged children.

I have underscored, however, five important areas for concentration, namely:

1. Establish more prekindergarten classes with carefully-planned programs of instruction.

2. Plan with the staff a sequential, developmental reading program, prekindergarten through adult classes, with special emphasis on effective beginning reading programs and on the use of corrective-clinical services for pupils at all grade levels.

3. Reduce class size and initiate more creative organizations for teaching reading.

4. Design and implement new and imaginative programs for preservice and in-service work in reading.

5. Involve the parents and community people in helping their own children to read better.

Will these actions be the "open sesame" to improved reading achievement for the disadvantaged? Once again, the answer is an emphatic, no! Not the "open sesame" but paths of action to be followed with resolution, wise planning, and the united effort of all. As I said when I spoke last year at this conference, the task ahead is great; but the "floodlights" are now being turned on in many of our cities. We can "see" what we are doing and know that reading improvement can be achieved in the here and now. Our disadvantaged can and must master the basic requisite to their future success as American citizens — they are going to learn to read!

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